

the guardian weekly

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Level » Advanced

Style » Individual or group activities

Welcome to the Guardian Weekly's special news-based materials to support learners and teachers of English. Each month, the Guardian Weekly newspaper selects topical news articles that can be used to practise English language skills. The materials are graded for two levels: Advanced and Lower Intermediate. These worksheets can be downloaded free from guardian.co.uk/weekly. You can also find more advice for teachers and learners from the Guardian Weekly's Learning English section on the site.

Materials prepared by Janet Hardy-Gould

Bolivia's child workers unite to end exploitation



A nine-year-old child labourer at a brick factory in Cochabamba, Bolivia Dado Galdieri/AP

Before reading

1 The article is about child workers in Bolivia. In small groups discuss the questions below about young people working in your country. Check the words in bold with the glossary on page 2, if necessary.

a What do you know about the **child labour** laws in your country?

b Are young people **banned** from doing certain jobs?

c Do **adolescents** receive a **decent wage** for their work?

2 Vocabulary from the article. Use the words to complete the definitions.

advocate, donor, ensure, exploit, harsh, lobby, rife

a If you workers, you treat them badly and give them little money.

b If you a politician, you try to influence his or her opinion.

c If working conditions are , they are difficult and unpleasant.

d If you are a to an organisation, you give it money.

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e If you an idea, you publicly support or recommend it.

f If a bad thing is very common, people say that it is .

g If you that something happens, you make certain that it takes place.

Article

Bolivia's child workers unite to end exploitation

- 1 Rodrigo Medrano Calle is a Bolivian labour leader who meets and lobbies top government officials. That's not surprising in a country where pay is often low, working conditions harsh and unions powerful. What's unusual is that Rodrigo is 14 years old, and his union's members are all children.
- 2 "I started working when I was nine, and I've done everything, shining shoes, bus driver's assistant, selling," said Rodrigo, who now sells chewing gum and cigarettes in bars at weekends, making \$7-\$8 for a night's work.
- 3 "I lived on the street for a time and was going in the wrong direction, but then I found the movement, and it gave me a reason to be. I'm going to fight for my *compañeros*' [comrades'] rights, not just my own."
- 4 Rodrigo's organisation, the Bolivian Union of Child and Adolescent Workers (Unatsbo), represents thousands of under-18s. There are similar chapters in Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru and Colombia, often funded by international donors. In Bolivia, successes include organising pay rises for children who sell newspapers on the streets of Potosí from 6 cents to 12 cents a paper.
- 5 Many international campaigners advocate an end to all child labour, but Unatsbo argues that, in a region where child labour is rife, it is more important to ensure young workers are not exploited. On paper, Bolivia bans under-14s from working, but nearly 750,000 children aged between five and 17 are involved in sometimes dangerous jobs.

- 6 Luz Rivera Daza, an adult counsellor for Unatsbo in Potosí, says many child workers are in a legal blind spot: their work is prohibited and so they have very little defence if employers exploit them through long hours, abuse them or refuse to pay a decent wage. "If you have to work, then you have to work exploited," she said of those situations.
- 7 Rolando Mamani started working on his mother's market stall in El Alto when he was 12. Now aged 17 he works two long days a week and earns enough for his transport to school. In fact, most working children in Bolivia go to school.
- 8 Rodrigo believes that instead of attempting to end many forms of child and adolescent work, the goal should be ending exploitation by creating part-time, safe and better-paying jobs for young people who want them. "The work of a child or adolescent is not bad - it helps society, it helps a family, and it helps us grow as people," he said.

Sara Shahriari La Paz

Glossary

child labour (noun) the employment of children in regular work

ban someone from doing something (verb) to say officially that someone must not do something

adolescent (noun) a young person who is developing from a child to an adult

decent wage (noun) fair and adequate pay
on paper (expression) when something is written down but isn't put into practice

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While reading

1 Read the article and complete the sentences below with one word or number from the text.

a Rodrigo Medrano Calle is the head of a Bolivian ...

b His role is surprising because he's ...

c All the members of his organisation are ...

d Rodrigo had his first job at the age of ...

e For a while, Rodrigo's home was the ...

f Unatsbo gets its money from overseas ...

g Unatsbo wants to stop young workers from being ...

h Most young Bolivian workers also attend ...

i Rodrigo thinks that young people working isn't necessarily ...

2 Read the text again and answer the questions.

a Which important people does Rodrigo speak to as leader of Unatsbo?

b In general, what is employment often like in Bolivia?

c What do you think Rodrigo means by, "(I) was going in the wrong direction"?

d What specific improvement has Unatsbo achieved?

e How are Unatsbo's ideas different to those of international campaigners?

f What is the law in Bolivia about young people working?

g What is the reality about the number of Bolivian child workers?

h According to Luz Rivera Daza, why do child workers have little protection?

i What do Rolando Mamani's earnings contribute to?

j Why does Rodrigo think work can be positive for young people?

3 Work with a partner and discuss the question below with reference to the article.

Do you think Rodrigo is right when he states that, "The work of a child or adolescent is not bad - it helps society, it helps a family, and it helps us grow as people."?

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After reading

- 1 Look back at paragraphs 2 and 3. Identify the structures (present perfect etc) in bold in the sentences and comment on their use.

a "I **started** working when I was nine, and I've **done** everything ..." (paragraph 2)

b "Rodrigo ... now **sells** chewing gum and cigarettes in bars at weekends ..." (paragraph 2)

c "(I) **was going** in the wrong direction, but then I **found** the movement ..." (paragraph 3)

d "I'm **going to fight** for my *compañeros*' rights, not just my own." (paragraph 3)

- 2 Read the summary and replace the words with synonyms from paragraphs 4 to 8 of the article.

Although child labour is **forbidden** in Bolivia, it is still **widespread** in many areas with **almost** 750,000 young people doing work which often fails to pay a **fair** wage.

The **aim** of the Unatsbo union isn't to **stop** all **types** of child labour but to ensure that young **employees** aren't exploited.

The union helps children and **teenagers** and **tries** to improve their working conditions. It has already succeeded in bringing about wage **increases** for some street sellers.

Although child labour is in Bolivia, it is still in many areas with 750,000 young people doing work which often fails to pay a wage. The of the Unatsbo union isn't to all of child labour but to ensure that young aren't exploited. The union helps children and and to improve their working conditions. It has already succeeded in bringing about wage for some street sellers.

Activity - interview role play

One student plays the union leader Rodrigo Medrano Calle and the rest of the class are international journalists. The student who plays Rodrigo should make notes about key aspects of his daily life, his work and opinions regarding child labour. The other students prepare a range of questions to ask Rodrigo using "you". Rodrigo then comes to the front of the class. The students pose their questions, which Rodrigo answers using "I". The class then repeat the process. The students are the same reporters but the interview now takes place in 16 years' time when Rodrigo is 30. The reporters quickly prepare a new range of questions to ask Rodrigo about his current life, ideas and achievements. The students act out the role play again as a class and see how Rodrigo's life and opinions may have changed.

Answers

Before reading

2 a exploit b lobby c harsh d donor e advocate f rife g ensure

While reading

1 a union b 14 c children d nine e street f donors g exploited h school i bad

2 a Top government officials.

b There is low pay and harsh working conditions.

c He possibly became involved in criminal activity.

d It has helped child newspaper sellers in Potosí get a pay rise.

e Many international campaigners want to ban all child labour. However, Unatsbo thinks that child labour is so common in Bolivia and nearby countries, that the most important thing is to stop the existing exploitation of child workers.

f Children under 14 aren't allowed to work.

g There are nearly 750,000 5 to 17-year-olds working.

h They are caught in a legal blind spot. Because they aren't allowed to work, they have very little defence against exploitation from employers.

i His transport to school.

j It can help them to grow as people. It also helps society and their families.

After reading

1 a past simple - to express a finished action in the past; present perfect - to relate experiences which happened at an unspecified time in the past

b present simple - to describe a regular habit

c past continuous - to express an ongoing activity in the past; past simple - to describe a specific past event which interrupted the ongoing activity

d going to - to talk about a future intention which has been considered and decided previously

2 prohibited/banned, rife, nearly, decent, goal, end, forms, workers, adolescents, attempts, rises